



Health Environment: Global Links

International Ecohealth Forum 2008 (IEF2008)



When worlds come together, unexpected synergies occur. “There are many things I’m looking forward to in the conference,” says Dr. Dominique Charron, IDRC’s Ecohealth Program Leader, of the December 2008 Forum in Merida, Mexico. “But with all these people coming together to exchange ideas, the main thing I’m anticipating is witnessing the intellectual sparks fly.”

Hosted by Mexico’s National Institute of Public Health (INSP), the Forum

fuses the collaborative efforts of Canada’s IDRC, the International Association for Ecology and Health (IAEH), and three Brazilian research bodies: the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ), the Institute of Ecological Research, Brazil (IPÊ), and the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Zootechny of the University of São Paulo, Brazil (USP). “The fact that we’re doing it together, and the size of the conference, is symptomatic of how far the ecohealth movement has come in the past 15 years,” says Dr. Charron.

The conference is not only a celebration of progress, but an evolutionary catalyst leading into the future. “It’s extremely exciting, all these groups coming together to forge progress in health-relevant discoveries at the interface of ecological and public health sciences,” says Dr. Jonathan Patz, president of the IAEH. “It’s a watershed event. Bringing together major institutions and scien-

tists across the fields of ecology and public health is really important, particularly in this era when we’re realizing that disease emergence and resurgence are often linked to ecosystem change and habitat or climate degradation.”

The Forum will help consolidate the growing international community of researchers, policy makers, and civil society representatives involved in various aspects of ecohealth. The intent is to strengthen understanding of the holistic links between ecosystems and human health, and reveal proactive responses and sustainable interventions. “We want to promote networking and exchange between disciplines, between continents, and between intellectual communities in order to foster more innovative research and interventions,” says Dr. Charron. “This is a milestone because for the first time the IDRC and the IAEH have co-convened a conference, and in doing so are going

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Profile: Dr. Mario Henry Rodriguez



“Doing research with an ecohealth approach conditioned me to using transdisciplinary methods,” Dr. Mario Henry Rodriguez says of his background researching malaria in Mexico. “As a public health

practitioner, this is very useful, because often I have to work with public health officials to find solutions to problems. When I do this I always have on one side of my mind the intention to obtain the best scientific solution—and on the other side, awareness of the practical implications for health services and target communities.”

Dr. Rodriguez is the Director General of Mexico’s National Institute of Public

Health (INSP), and a chief coordinator for COPEH-TLAC’s Mexican node. He earned his doctorate in medical parasitology at the University of London, and for many years has studied the biology of vector-borne diseases and vector-parasite interactions. Prior to his appointment as Director General, he was Director of the INSP’s Center for Malaria Research and later its Center for Research on Infectious Diseases.

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beyond the overlap between our two audiences: this will effectively globalize the movement. Researchers, practitioners, policy makers, and community leaders from developed and developing countries will come together in more substantial ways than in the past.”

Dr. Ulisses Confalonieri of FIOCRUZ has similar expectations of the Forum. “The conference would be important and timely anywhere in the world, but the fact that it is taking place in ... Latin America can add new issues,” he says, noting that public health research in North America is often quite different from Latin American approaches. “People have been speaking more

lately about ‘global health.’ Everything is ‘global’ now, or should be. It’s time to have a *global* public health research, global epidemiology, global ecohealth.”

To enliven the Merida mix even further, civil society representatives have been invited. “We want to go beyond what you might call a ‘classical academic conference,’” explains Dr. Charron. Decision makers, civil society representatives, and artists will interact with researchers on issues of environment and health.

“By bringing people together, we have the opportunity to spark really innovative approaches to some of the biggest challenges of our time—environmental sustainability and risks to human health,” says Dr. Charron. “Because of the state of the planet, it’s no longer enough for us to work in isolation, whether disciplinary or continental. We must seek ways of working across disciplines, and across developed and developing country realities, to find real solutions.”

Call for Submissions for IEF2008

Researchers, policy makers, and practitioners are invited to submit abstracts for conference participation. To help make this a milestone event, Forum delegates are encouraged to innovate, take on transdisciplinary approaches, and bridge methodological gaps. Oral communications, posters, videos, and other media presentations are welcome, as are symposia or training workshops / short courses (for examples of sessions or presentations see <http://www.ecohealth2008.org/presentation.php>)

Submission deadline is June 30, 2008. To create a user profile for the IEF 2008 and begin the abstract submission process, visit:

<http://www.ecohealth2008.org/sglobal>

Editorial: See you in Merida, Mexico!

The International Ecohealth Forum 2008 is coming to Merida, Mexico!

When you crack open your new issue of the *Health — Environment: Global Links* newsletter with your steaming cup of breakfast coffee/tea/mate, we hope you will be elated at the thought of meeting the global ecohealth community and making new friends at the International Ecohealth Forum 2008 and Second Biennial Conference of the International Association for Ecology and Health. You will immediately consider submitting an innovative abstract while pondering ancient

Mayan travel routes, thought-provoking ecohealth debates, and lovely colonial buildings nestled under swaying green trees in the warm sun of Merida in early December....

The thrill of live discussions, the myriad networking opportunities, and the pleasures of strolling through a poster area abuzz with ideas are all reasons to register early for IEF 2008. Come hear inspiring keynote speakers and be galvanized with hundreds of other listeners into becoming champions for ecohealth. Reflect on lessons learned and challenges in research and practice,

view art and culture on an ecohealth theme, and participate in field visits to witness ecohealth in practice. Join in a growing global community of practice in ecohealth, and interact with other researchers, community members, and decision makers from around the world, for the betterment of our ecosystems and the improvement of human health.

So mark your calendars and see you all in Merida this December! Please spread the word: invite your friends—do not miss this milestone in the global ecohealth movement!



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COPES-AOC: Translating momentum into action

The Community of Practice in Ecohealth in Western and Central Africa (COPES-AOC) wants to see ecohealth approaches firmly embedded in the region. It is well on its way, says Dr. Benjamin Fayomi, coordinator of COPES-AOC, with its investment in young researchers, its successful work in institutionalizing the approaches, and more recently, its efforts to mobilize resources to sustain ecohealth practice over the long term.

COPES-AOC has made a long-term commitment to training young researchers in the region. AOC also recognizes that institutionalization in the region's academic institutions must be supported by ecohealth research activities. With IDRC support, young researchers from different disciplines have been brought together for the past few years. For example, in the summer of 2006, training awardees spent one week immersed in ecohealth methodology and practice in Benin.

Faso, Benin, and Cameroun, notes Dr. Fayomi.



The formal integration of ecohealth approaches is also well under way in academic institutions across the Central and West African region. In a declaration drafted at a 2006 meeting of the Ecohealth Regional Funds in Dakar, university rectors and institution directors committed themselves to encouraging the broader adoption of ecohealth thinking. Dr. Fayomi says the idea is not to have a separate ecohealth diploma, but to truly integrate the ecohealth concept in established disciplines and departments. As the next step, in a meeting in Abidjan, Ivory Coast in February 2008, the COPES-AOC finalized a set of ecohealth modules to be integrated in various departments at the participating universities.

The governance models that now exist in each of the region's institutions represent an achievement

that will be very useful in the future. Committees are now in place that look at ecohealth as part of their portfolio, while national facilitators link the COPES-AOC and the groups working with the ecohealth modules integrated at the universities.

As Dr. Fayomi recounts COPES-AOC's achievements to date, he underlines the importance of sustaining its momentum. While IDRC has supported the region's activities so far, Dr. Fayomi does not expect this funding to be in place forever. Therefore, the COPES-AOC's focus in 2008 will be to mobilize resources from a range of organizations. Contact has already been established with the African Development Bank, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the World Health Organization (WHO). An ecohealth training workshop on resource mobilization in April 2008 will be followed by a meeting with representatives from these and other potential partner organizations.

Ecohealth approaches have achieved real momentum in the region's universities, says Dr. Fayomi. Now is the time to translate that momentum into action on the ground. To facilitate this, COPES-AOC organized a meeting in December 2007 that brought together regional universities, municipalities, and other organizations to develop a joint waste management project with an ecohealth perspective.



Each training workshop focuses on a different theme. Waste management—a menace in the region—was the theme in 2007, while ecohealth approaches to water quality, another pressing issue, will occupy students in 2008. This year, professors can also compete for an award that encourages broader thinking about ecohealth perspectives. Response to the ecohealth awards has been enthusiastic in all six of the participating institutions from Ivory Coast, Burkina





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COPEH-TLAC: Partnering with universities to enhance communities of practice



San Marcos co-hosted a forum to explore the particular challenges of climate change and health in the context of university communities.

The ECOSAD team sparked a number of training endeavours, including a February 2008 course on statistical analysis for their researchers, directed by Aline Philibert, Health and Environment Researcher from

Not all the training and cross-pollination supported by the Andean Node was face-to-face. “There is regular online exchange between members of COPEH-TLAC from Latin America, through e-mail and other methods,” says Dr. Betancourt. “This is an important means of refining viewpoints and methodologies about the ecohealth approach.”

Ruth Arroyo of the National University of San Marcos, Lima, another co-coordinator of the Andean Node, is also pleased with the progress achieved over the past year, particularly from the standpoint of applied research. “I’m satisfied because COPEH-TLAC is a community of practice—it is not a simple web of information. We [at ECOSAD] have been sharing knowledge and methodologies used in our ecohealth research projects from a social medicine point of view.” Partnering with universities will bring benefits for human health and ecosystems, she says, as today’s students become tomorrow’s policymakers. “We strengthened many of our relationships with academic institutions, which will now begin to incorporate the ecosystem approach in their professional education programs.”

Members of the Andean Node plan to increase the visibility of their research and continue to build international relationships. “We hope to ensure high attendance of COPEH-TLAC members at the Ecohealth Forum in Merida, Mexico,” says Dr. Betancourt. “Generally, we wish to disseminate the experiences of COPEH-TLAC. We will do this in Merida, and also at the International Conference on Epidemiology in Occupational Health in Costa Rica in June.”

“COPEH-TLAC is made up of people with a profound sense of social commitment. It is very gratifying to be involved,” says Dr. Oscar Betancourt, Director of Ecuador’s Foundation for Health, Environment, and Work (FUNSAD-Ecuador). “When sharing research methodologies, or exchanging strategies to link research with interventions and policy, there is a sense of solidarity among everyone, a friendship, and concern for common well-being.”

Dr. Betancourt is a co-coordinator of the Andean Node of COPEH-TLAC, a regional network that focuses on the relationship between ecosystem approaches and human health. The Andean Node is one of six regional nodes of COPEH-TLAC, with others in Chile, Brazil, Mexico, Costa Rica, and Canada. In the past year, the Andean Node consolidated its structure, integrating the efforts of FUNSAD-Ecuador with members of another NGO, ECOSAD-Peru, and forming what is known as the “Second Ring” around COPEH-TLAC—a grouping of the node’s most active members. Second Ring members attended a workshop in Cuernavaca, Mexico, in September 2007 to share evaluation, research, and planning methods they use. Two months later, the Andean Node and Peru’s National University of

the Center for the Study of Biological Interactions between Health and the Environment (CINBIOSE)-UQAM, with IDRC support and with the participation of other members of the Andean Node. ECOSAD also organized a workshop on ecosystem approaches to research for students and teachers at Bolivia’s San Andrés University in La Paz. In January, researchers at the National University of Colombia joined COPEH-TLAC to present a course to Master’s students on the interaction between workers’ health and the environment.

Several members of the Andean Node attended the 19th Conference of the International Society for Environmental Epidemiology (ISEE), in Mexico City last September. Members also participated in the January 2008 meeting of the project “Diagnostics and prediction of climate variability and human health impacts in the tropical Americas,” organized by Mexico’s INSP in collaboration with IDRC and the Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research, says Dr. Betancourt. Through these activities, he says, “We are disseminating and enriching the principles and strategies of the ecosystemic approach to human health, in academic circles, with policymakers, and with stakeholders.”



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COPEH-MENA: Fostering connections and cooperation

The disconnect between government departments and institutions working on health and environmental issues spans the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. COPEH-MENA's most recent study aims to address that disconnect by identifying key players and decision makers and establishing connections among them. Examining the strengths and limitations of the current systems will help determine how ecohealth approaches could serve stakeholders and improve their interventions. Dr. Laamari Abdelali, of the Moroccan National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRA) coordinates COPEH-MENA's policy-mapping activity.

The near-complete two-year study, which focused on mapping health, water, and environmental policy in Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan, boasts some remarkable achievements already. COPEH-MENA's three-stage analysis started with a fact-finding mission: Who does what, where and how? How do different government departments perceive health and water issues? What level of cooperation already exists between sectors?

Noting that the various stages of the study are unfolding differently and at different times in each country, Dr. Abdelali describes what took place in Morocco. There, the study followed a research project on wastewater management carried out by COPEH-MENA, which not only sounded the alarm on that pressing issue to officials, but also brought ecohealth approaches into sharper focus.

Once key actors and their roles and responsibilities had been identified in

the context of COPEH-MENA's study, the group invited representatives from the country's ministries of agriculture, environment, health, and interior to a workshop. More than 50 participants learned of ecohealth approaches and discussed the value of these alternative approaches to drinking water management.

Participants developed a national chart depicting the responsibilities of the four ministries, and providing a platform to allow easy visualization of the linkages and the fit for an ecohealth perspective.

The study's third stage, institutionalization of ecohealth approaches, is the ultimate goal. COPEH-MENA hopes to transfer lessons learned between different countries. The group plans to do a comparative assessment between Morocco and Lebanon; Jordan and Egypt are proceeding differently.

Dr. Abdelali said he is impressed by the willingness to cooperate and the

enthusiasm for ecohealth approaches shown by players in the different sectors. Directors in the invited ministries are beginning to familiarize themselves with ecohealth concepts—an example of this interest is the high demand for the ecohealth team to participate in wastewater management projects in the province of Settat. Recently, the Minister of Health contacted the director of INRA to congratulate him on these efforts and to ask for more information on ecohealth. The team found that attracting the national media assisted in reaching the country's highest level policy makers.

COPEH-MENA will release a report with the results of its latest activity in June 2008, and hopes to further raise awareness of ecohealth approaches in a subsequent project. COPEH-MENA hopes to involve other countries in the region that could integrate ecohealth approaches. Dr. Abdelali has already been in contact with colleagues in Syria, Algeria and Tunisia.





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COPEH-Can: Fostering eco-health in Canada

A new phase in Canada's contribution to ecohealth has begun with the creation of a Canadian Community of Practice (COPEH-Can). Following in the footsteps of other regions of the world, COPEH-Can will further develop excellence and research capacity in ecohealth in Canada. Through an IDRC grant, over the next three years COPEH-Can will engage a consortium of three Canadian universities—the Université du Québec à Montréal, the University of Guelph, and the University of British Columbia—to design and deliver an 11-day graduate-level course on ecohealth. Offered to Canadian-based students and professionals engaged in international / development work, the first annual course will be held in Vancouver, August 5–15, 2008. Consortium universities will also continue to build networks in three regional research nodes (Quebec / Maritimes, Ontario and B.C. / Prairies / Territories respectively), fostering the growth of ecohealth throughout Canada.

www.copeh-canada.org/

EcoHealth journal going strong

The Spring 2008 issue of the journal *EcoHealth* features a study linking increased mortality among wild pandas in China—already reduced to a population of about 1,600—to an intestinal parasite, the spread of which may be abetted by habitat loss. The panda study's alarming findings recently made the front page of the national American newspaper *USA Today*, with *EcoHealth* cited as the source publication.

Published by the International Association of Ecology and Health (IAEH), *Ecohealth* formed in 2004 with the fusion of two complementary research journals—*Ecosystem Health* and *Global Change and Human Health*. Front-page attention to ecohealth research is a fitting way to mark the journal's fifth year of publication, as it continues to print enlightening peer-reviewed studies by transdisciplinary researchers around the world.

Other studies in the current issue include: correlations between air temperature and the spread of West Nile virus; research on the linkages between agriculture, urbanization and Buruli ulcer disease; Australian dryland salinity and Ross River Virus; and chytridiomycosis and amphibian decline in the Americas.

www.ecohealth.net

Nairobi 2007

In November of 2007, IDRC invited research partners from seven countries in East and Southern Africa to a capacity-building workshop in Nairobi, Kenya. The 27 participants—with backgrounds in malaria, HIV/AIDS, urban health, and other research areas—shared experiences, explored specific regional ecohealth issues and drew conclusions about their successes and challenges. A large part of the five-day workshop was devoted to Outcome Mapping, a complementary framework to ecohealth that provides researchers with tools for planning and assessing the impact of their efforts to facilitate social change. The workshop inspired new relationships among researchers, a promising step towards a future COPEH in East and Southern Africa. For more information on the Outcome Mapping methodology, please visit <http://www.idrc.ca/evaluation/>

Agriculture and Health Research Platform: Finding the links, maximizing the impact

“The linkages between agricultural and health problems are becoming more numerous, and more pronounced, and many such problems cannot be solved by either sector acting alone,” says Dr. Stuart Gillespie, explaining the genesis of the Agriculture and Health Research Platform (AHRP). Gillespie is an AHRP coordinator and research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), which oversees the Platform on behalf of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). The Platform was created in cooperation with the health research community, notably the World Health Organization, to provide “a forum for the agriculture and health sectors to come together ... and provide adaptable approaches, principles, processes and options” for responding to adverse agriculture and health linkages, says Gillespie. Research priorities for the Platform were refined at a June 2007 meeting in Geneva, resulting in a recent IDRC-funded call for concept notes that requested “cutting-edge research at the intersections of agriculture and health that seeks to maximize impact on the rural poor.” The Platform also hopes to facilitate a more concerted donor effort around these critical issues. For more information, see www.ifpri.org/themes/aghealth/aghealth.asp



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IPMA: An integrated approach in the fight against malaria

Sub-Saharan Africa is home to 90% of the world's malaria victims—between 300 and 450 million people. Of these cases, about 800,000 Africans, mostly young children, die of malaria each year. In response to these staggering statistics, and building on the lessons of past malaria control strategies, IDRC is launching the Integrated Program on Malaria in sub-Saharan Africa (IPMA).

Under the guidance of an expert Scientific Advisory Committee, IPMA is not searching for a “silver bullet”—a single medical or technological advance to tackle the complex challenge of malaria control—but an integrated set of tools appropriate to local needs. IDRC Ecohealth program leader Dr. Dominique Charron explains: “The underlying premise of IPMA is that malaria continues to devastate sub-Saharan Africa, despite there being a really good understanding of the disease, and a number of ideas on how to control it.”

Malaria is a complex problem—and many communities in Africa must cope with challenges linked to public health systems and natural resource management, as well as issues related to climate change, armed conflict and migration—IPMA will use an integrated approach in the fight against malaria in Africa. To do so, says Dr. Charron, much cooperation will be needed. “We anticipate more collaboration and participation from a diverse set of stakeholders to support a substantial program and strengthen its overall impact over the coming five or six years.” Thus, a competitive call for research proposals will be launched as a first step in a multi-phase process aimed to implement the comprehensive approach embraced by IPMA.

Profile: Dr. Mario Henry Rodriguez

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“I work with a multidisciplinary group with expertise in several areas of malaria research,” explains Dr. Rodriguez. “There are many interrelated issues with such a disease, from the molecular biology, genetics, and proteomics of parasite-vector interactions to field research in insecticide resistance, and the development of new control strategies.” Along with this, says Dr. Rodriguez, lie the equally challenging tasks of control program organization, and assessing the interaction of such programs with endemic populations.

There is a payoff to engaging all the interrelated factors and actors, both in terms of process and results, Dr. Rodriguez says. “This multidisciplinary approach helps us to conduct research with an ecohealth perspective... The main success in these malaria projects has been to provide new control strategies. Notably, we provided inputs to the malaria control program to reduce transmission rates—without insecticides, but with community participation in vector management at the breeding sites.”

With assistance from the IDRC, ecohealth-based research spearheaded by Dr. Rodriguez and the INSP turned up surprising data on malaria: for instance, that infected humans, rather than mosquitoes, were the primary vectors of the disease in the test region of Oaxaca. Armed with new information and community-based responses—village women wielding algae-scooping nets, among others—between 1998 and 2003, ecohealth stakeholders saw the number of malaria cases in Oaxaca drop from 15,000 to 400.

“The main lesson from an ecohealth perspective was the realization that public health interventions require the participation of several actors, including scientists, health practitioners, NGOs, and the community,” says Dr. Rodriguez. “But this is not an easy task. There are problems of sustainability of the interventions, and the difficulties inherent in scaling up any successful intervention, from one or few communities to a wider area, or even to a state or national level.”

Ecohealth-based research and praxis continue for Dr. Rodriguez and the INSP. “I began using the ecohealth approach while I was the director of the Center for Malaria Research, and there it was straightforward that there were interactions between the biological part of the problem, and the ecosystems and communities,” he says. “This is now very useful in my role as Director General of INSP, as the interactions with government, universities, and participants in the public health sector are carried out using a transdisciplinary approach.”



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Coming events

June 9-11 and 11-13, 2008

EPICOH-NEUREOH Conferences (San Jose, Costa Rica)

Of particular interest to those involved in the epidemiological or neurotoxicological aspects of occupational health, the theme for both conferences this year is "Multiple Exposures, Multiple Effects."

www.epicoh-neureoh2008.com

July 16-20, 2008

Global Ecological Integrity Group Conference (Berlin, Germany)

GEIG's 2008 conference brings together scholars and researchers to explore the theme "Reconciling Human Existence and Ecological Integrity" from a variety of legal, philosophical, and biological perspectives.

www.globalecointegrity.net/conferences.html

August 3-8, 2008

XVII International AIDS Conference (Mexico City, Mexico)

A rallying call to stakeholders worldwide, the 17th International AIDS Conference is themed "Universal Action Now," defining and provoking the effort needed to ensure universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010.

www.aids2008.org

26-29 August, 2008

First Interministerial Conference on Health and Environment in Africa: Health Security through Healthy Environments (Libreville, Gabon)

The conference aims to secure political commitment to advance policy, institutional and investment changes required to reduce environmental threats to health in support of sustainable development in Africa.

<http://www.unep.org/health-env/>

October 16-19, 2008

Open Meeting 2008: 7th International Science Conference on the Human Dimensions of Global Environmental Change (New Delhi, India)

With particular emphasis on the South Asia region, the conference will augment discussions of climate change with other current socio-environmental topics: resource shortages, the destruction of ecosystem services, and new threats to human health.

www.openmeeting2008.org/

October 26-29, 2008

15th Canadian Conference on International Health (Ottawa, Canada)

Entitled 'Checking in: Health for All or Health for Some?' the conference offers a kaleidoscope of perspectives on primary health care, and a forum for re-examining 30 years of policy and research since the WHO's Alma Ata declaration of "Health for All by the Year 2000."

www.csih.org/en/ccih/index.asp

November 3-7, 2008

World Urban Forum 4 (Nanjing, China)

The United Nations' fourth WUF gathering will explore the effects of ongoing urbanization on poverty, health, and sustainability, under the rubric "Harmonious Urbanization: The Challenge of Balanced Territorial Development."

For more information, click on the World Urban Forum 4 link at www.unhabitat.org

November 17-19, 2008

Global Ministerial Forum on Research for Health (Bamako, Mali)

Linking health and social development ministers with public/private stakeholders in education, food, water, and agriculture, the Forum offers 600 invitees the chance to explore new directions in e-health through panel discussions, debates, roundtables and networking.

<http://bamako2008.org>

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